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Statement of Bruce Morris
Chairman of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus
State Representative for the 140th Assembly District
For the Joint Committee on Judiciary

March, 4, 2015

In Support of:

H.B. No. 6926, An Act Concerning Lengthy sentences for Crimes Committed By A Child Or Youth.
S.B. No. 796, An Act Concerning the Lengthy sentences for Crimes Committed By A Child Or Youth
And the Sentencing Of a Child Or Youth Convicted of Certain Felony Offenses.

Good Afternoon Chairman Coleman, Tong, and Honorable members of the Judiciary Committee, as Chairman of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, I would like to express our strong support of *H.B. 6926, and S.B. 796*.

H.B. 6926 and S.B. 796 both address the lengthy sentences that Juveniles face in the state of Connecticut.

In the past decade the United States Supreme Court has held that juvenile offenders cannot be sentenced as if they were adults. In the case of *Graham v. Florida* the court ruled that a juvenile could not be sentenced to life without parole for a non-homicide crime. In the case *Miller v. Alabama* the court forbade a mandatory sentence of life without parole for children convicted of homicide.

The Supreme Court upheld these decisions based on conclusions with scientific evidence that show the psychological and developmental differences between a child and an adult. There are fundamental differences between the parts of the brain involved in behavior control because of the lessened capabilities of children the Supreme Court believes juveniles are deserving of lesser punishments.

In the State of Connecticut, however, under current law, individuals prosecuted as adults for crimes committed when they were under 18 are subject to the same parole rules as adults. According to the Supreme Court, because the character and mind of a juvenile is not fully formed juveniles are more capable of change than adults. Even in the cases of very serious crimes the juvenile is not incapable of reform.

For these reasons, incarcerated juveniles should not be subject the same parole laws as incarcerated adults. The Supreme Court ruling and countless studies clearly prove the developmental differences in adults and children.

Furthermore, the reality in Connecticut is that Black and Latino youth are incarcerated at a disproportionately higher rate than white youth. To empower all communities and to eliminate the educational and employments barriers that incarcerated youths face, the system needs to be remedied. Both H.B. 6926 and S.B. 796 would be a step in addressing the structural racial barriers our youths face in this state.